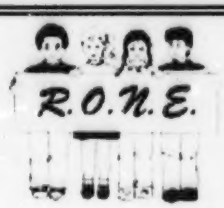

Analysis of School Jurisdiction 1997- 1998 Annual Education Results Reports

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Alberta Learning

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This document is intended primarily for:
Administrators
Stakeholders
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Parents
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Alberta Learning

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Introduction

In January 1999, Alberta Learning's Regional Office & Native Education Branch committed to ensuring a more substantive analysis of the Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs).

The completion of the AERR by all school jurisdictions is a requirement of Alberta Learning and the Government of Alberta (Government Accountability Act). It is an extensive process that requires a thorough review of all of the elements of our educational system.

The following report is the first analysis of the AERRs that provides both qualitative and quantitative results to the annual reporting process. The report identifies specific recommendations based on the review of the school jurisdictions' AERRs.

The process of developing this report includes:

- Completion of a detailed content analysis of each school jurisdiction's AERR
- Personal interviews with the superintendent or designate
- Compilation of the content analysis and interview data
- Analysis of that material

A limitation of the data is that it is not based on a scientific survey. As well, eight school jurisdictions identified no issues or concerns, which initself requires additional review. Finally, the data are summarized from the 1997-98 AERRs completed on or before November 1998 and many changes have occurred since this time.

Executive Summary

The Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs) provide a meaningful accountability linkage between school boards and the Department of Learning. The information indicates how well Boards are achieving targets and identifies areas where additional work is required. This reporting process provides meaningful data for government's three-year business planning process and provides a forum for sharing among all school jurisdictions.

The review of the 1997-98 AERRs shows that many of the jurisdictions are engaged in exemplary practices in relationship to the creation of their AERR, although some school boards are being challenged to meet the accountability requirements of government. Recommendations to improve this include developing a process through which the department and the school boards can establish greater commonality on school board and provincial priorities; and having Alberta Learning initiate discussions regarding in-service sessions on planning, measurement, and evaluation design.

In the area of curricular programs, school jurisdictions reported significant success. A common example of this success was the implementation of Career and Technology Studies where students are receiving highly relevant career transition opportunities. Outreach programs that provide an option to at-risk students, who have not found success in the regular high school, and provide students with more choice and flexibility in how they pursue their high school studies was another area of notable achievement. In addition, school jurisdictions reported successes in the application of technology as an instruction support to student learning. For example, the use of the internet as a highly dynamic information supplement to classroom resources is one exciting application of technology. Many school jurisdictions identified concerns regarding socio-economic variables that are negatively affecting the achievement of students; and indicated that greater emphasis is needed on junior/senior high mathematics.

Many School Boards reported fiscal pressures across a range of budget areas. Specific funding pressures identified include: implementing technology, providing for special needs students; population density/distance issues related to small schools; staff costs; cost of establishing and maintaining partnerships and the cost of implementing new curriculum. Since the time of these reports being submitted, Alberta Learning has:

- removed funding caps on Code 42 students with Severe Behavior Disabilities;
- removed funding caps on English as a Second Language students;
- allocated $151 million to eliminate school board deficits;
- increased sparsity and distance monies to school boards facing these issues
- allocated School Facilities Innovation Fund dollars to eight school boards for development of wide area networks;
- initiated a dialogue with school jurisdiction staff and trustees to continue to improve accountability and funding relationships.

Issues and Trends

The School Boards were asked to identify particular issues and trends which were subsequently categorized as: 1) finance 2) administrative 3) community 4) students 5) program 6) staff and 7) facilities. The frequency with which these items were identified is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Issues and Trends

Category	Frequency	Percent
Finance	69	25
Administrative	53	19
Community	51	18
Students	42	15
Program	31	11
Staff	18	6
Facilities	16	6
Total	280	100

Financial Issues

The 69 funding issues reviewed included concerns such as: general funding pressures as well as specific pressures such as funding to implement technology; cost of providing for special needs students; population density/distance issues related to small schools; staff costs; cost of establishing and maintaining partnerships; and the cost of implementing new curriculum. Of note, only one comment mentioned transportation funding as inadequate. The financial issues are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 – Financial Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Overall funding pressures	27	39
Technology cost pressures	14	20
Special needs students funding	14	20
Population density/ distance associated with small schools	6	9
Miscellaneous	8	12
Total	69	100

Administrative Issues

There were 53 administrative issues identified. From the 33 jurisdictions that noted these issues, 37.5% (20) report positive results of the evolving governance models or stabilization and consolidation of the new regionalized school jurisdiction organizations. Twenty-five percent (13) were neutral statements and 37.5 % (20) noted concerns

regarding the impact of provincial requirements on administration which has been impacted by school-based decision making, accountability and choice, or size of regionalized jurisdictions and the related impact on travel times and other aspects of administering the jurisdiction.

Table 3 – Administrative Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Positive statements regarding evolving governance models	20	37.5
Neutral statements commenting on administrative processes	13	25
Concerns regarding the impact of provincial requirements on administration or the need for more support	20	37.5
Total	53	100

Community Issues

Most of the 51 community issues identified by 31 jurisdictions (73% or 37) were observations about socio-economic conditions; rural-urban migration; or population growth that impact service delivery and that are largely beyond the direct control of the school jurisdiction.

Variables of concern include a gap between the rich and poor; the impact of poverty on students; declining public confidence in education; and the perceived need for school councils to raise funds for schools. Many responses were made about the positive dynamics operating in school councils (including meaningful parent involvement); community partnership; useful contributions for planning; and overall improved communication with the community.

Table 4 – Community Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Observations regarding socio-economic conditions or population shifts affecting service delivery	37	73
Variables seen to have a direct negative impact on students	7	13.5
Positive observations regarding community dynamics	7	13.5
Total	51	100

Student Issues

There were 42 issues relating to students. The greatest concerns - 33% - (14) addressed meeting the needs of students due to issues such as poverty, transient population, and cultural disadvantage. There were positive views regarding student achievements or successes and there were additional concerns regarding decreasing or increasing enrollment; student achievement; completion rates; and basic skill acquisition.

Table 5 – Student Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Meeting the needs of students	14	33
Student achievement or successes	10	24
Declining student enrollment	6	14.3
Increasing student enrollment	6	14.3
Other student issues	6	14.3
Total	42	100

Program Issues

Eleven percent (31) of the total items were related to program issues. There has been a positive response to Outreach Programs; Career and Technology Programs; Technology Plans and the impact of technology on program delivery (e.g. virtual schools); and in meeting the special needs of students even in small schools. Issues of concern include the slow pace of technology implementation; the levels of student achievement in mathematics; and the rapid pace of curriculum change.

Staff Issues

There were 18 items addressed in this category. There was positive response 28% (5) to the benefits of the professional development consortia and staff development opportunities. There was 50% or (9) concerns with regard to labour issues; workplace challenges; the need for more professional development; and challenges faced in recruiting to specialized positions in science and math.

Facilities Issues

There were 16 (6%) of the total number of items addressing facilities matters from 12 jurisdictions. To summarize, the issues concerned the need for more or better facilities to accommodate growth and/or shifting populations.

Conclusions

In interpreting the data, keep in mind that the analysis has been conducted on responses completed on or before November 1998 and that the survey was not conducted scientifically. Eight school jurisdictions did not identify any issues or concerns. This could be a reflection that the AERR is still in its development stage. However, the results do provide valuable information.

Fiscal matters continue to be an important item for school jurisdictions as indicated by the number of jurisdictions identifying pressures. Many of the specific pressures reported have already begun to be addressed by the Ministry, such as meeting the needs of students with special needs; implementing technology; and operating small schools affected by population density and distance. This will continue to be an important area for the department to work with school jurisdictions.

With regard to administrative issues, there are a number of jurisdictions that have achieved balance in their operations in relationship to changes initiated by Alberta Learning. However, there are also a number of jurisdictions still working to find this balance. This would indicate the need to review the issues affecting these jurisdictions and their relationships with the Department.

Community issues point to complex phenomena in the province's socio-economic contexts. These issues should add to the importance given to Goal 3 in the Province's Three-Year Plan for Education regarding the implementation of coordinated, inter-departmental services to children as a means to offset the impact of poverty and related variables.

Student issues that were raised were often related to finance issues, especially regarding the concerns of meeting the needs of students with special needs. Recently, funding for special needs students has been increased and this area may also warrant closer study to identify what is working and what is not. The School Facilities Task Force Study will continue to be challenged in response to the phenomenon of shifting populations within the province.

Program issues reflect a success story, particularly in the areas of Outreach, Career Technology Studies (CTS), and the positive impact of technology on student learning.

Labour concerns and challenges in the workplace remain a considerable concern for local decision-makers.

Facilities and community issues overlap around the shifting population and, as noted earlier, the School Facilities Task Force has considered this issue extensively and implementation of the Task Force recommendations is underway. Jurisdictions most affected by population shifts have identified the need to continue to work closely with the School Facilities Branch in the Department of Infrastructure.

Provincial Priorities - Implications for Planning

The provincial government established four priority areas in 1997-98. The success of the School Boards in reporting and rating these priorities is noted in Table 6.

Table 6 – Provincial Priorities

	Reported			Rated	
Priority Area	**Yes**	**No**	**Some**	**Yes**	**No**
Increasing High School Completion	47(78%)	11(19%)	2(3%)	Ex. – 7(12%) Sat. – 15(25%) N.I.- 7(12%)	31(52%)
Improving Secondary Math	44(73%)	12(20%)	4(7%)	Ex. – 5(8%) Sat. – 15(25%) N.I. – 9(15%)	31(52%)
Improving Coordination of Services	45(75%)	8(13%)	7(12%)	Ex- 9(15%) Sat.-19(32%) N.I. – 6(10%)	26(43%)
Improving Access to Technology	47(78%)	6(10%)	7(12%)	Ex.- 7(12%) Sat. – 22(37%) N.I.- 3(5%)	28(47%)
Board Identified Priority (see below)	35(58%)	25(42%)	N/A	Ex. 4(7%) Sat.-10(17%) N.I.- 3(5%)	43(72%)

*Ex. = Excellent, Sat. = Satisfactory, N.I. = Needs Improvement

Most Boards are utilizing provincial priorities in their AERRs but only about half of them are rating the success of these priorities. The challenge of inter-relating the provincial and local Board priorities requires additional discussion. Boards often face priorities and challenges that are compelling for the trustees and senior management. A more optimal inter-relationship between the Boards and the Province will need to be identified and implemented. Some notable accomplishments and challenges affecting these priorities include the following:

Coordinated Delivery of Services to Children – Five jurisdictions identified issues regarding coordinated delivery of services to children; two noted strong commitment to school-based interagency teams; one identified a requirement for clearer direction from regional authorities; two jurisdictions identified the progress they are achieving with their master agreement with Aspen Health, Family and Social Services, and Justice.

High School Completion - Two jurisdictions reported conducting graduate follow-up or leavers surveys. As noted in the issues section of this report, a number of jurisdictions are viewing alternative programs as a success story in education as a means to meet the needs of a wider range of students.

Secondary Math 7-12 - Six jurisdictions noted the extent they are concentrating on math. Strategies include: emphasizing Grade 9 Math by providing year long Math 9 at twice the normal time allocation; teaching Math 10 as a full year course; ensuring math has a district-wide focus; conveying high expectations for math achievement; providing streaming options in Math 9; reporting Math results very clearly; and outlining related improvement plans.

Jurisdictions recommended a more clearly defined intermediate level high school math program and approved the one-year delay in implementation of applied Math 10.

Technology - Several jurisdictions noted the critical importance of emphasizing the development of teachers' technology skills. Although access to technology exceeds provincial expectations in many cases, the focus continues on teacher skills through presentations, workshops, lead teacher at each school, district technology committee and planning.

Notable gains in student computer ratios were noted. In at least one jurisdiction, student e-mail is available to all. One jurisdiction recommended that computer labs should not be included as classroom space in utilization rates.

Board Priorities

Thirty-five School Boards noted 20 local priorities often in relationship to provincial or local goals as noted in Table 7.

Keep in mind that not all Boards use the AERR as a means to communicate their priorities and the AERRs are not a scientific survey of Board priorities. Nevertheless, the data does convey some insight into the relationship between local context and the identification of local priorities for school boards. For example, the high incidence of "enhancing faith development/Catholicity" for Separate School Boards indicates a unique aspect. Other areas receiving frequent mention include improving: overall student achievement; satisfaction with education quality; team work; the fiscal position of the jurisdiction; professional development; student and staff health; career counseling for students; and upgrading or building new facilities.

Table 7 – Board Priorities

Priority Area	Frequency
Enhance faith development/Catholicity	8
Improve student achievement overall	7
Improve satisfaction with education quality	6
Improve team work – in response to regionalization	5
Improve financial position of the jurisdiction	4
Enhance professional development/quality teaching	4
Upgrade, expand or build new facilities	3
Promote student/staff health	3
Improve career counselling for students	3
Increase parent/school council involvement	2
Improve SBDM	2
Improve program/school choice	2
Plan for enrollment increases	1
Improve reporting of student progress	1
Improve planning process	1
Implement safe and caring schools	1
Implement a resource officer program	1
Enhance values and citizenship	1
Enhance CTS	1
Enhance environmental awareness	1
Total	57

The pattern for Board priorities focuses extensively on improvements both in terms of internal and external organizational dynamics. The specific priority areas and the range of items reflect the extent to which the local context is driving priority setting for school boards. This information provides a basis for discussion on setting provincial and local priorities between the province and the local school boards.

Results Achieved – Required Performance Measures

The AERRs were reviewed to determine if the required provincial measures were reported; this information is summarized in Table 8. Table 8 also indicates the school board's assessment of how well it met its expectations as outlined in its Three-Year Plan

Table 8 – Inclusion of Required Performance Measures in AERRs

Results Measure	No. of AERRs with measure	Percentage assessing result
1. Percentage of students who achieve acceptable standard/standard of excellence on provincial achievement tests	Yes – *56* No - *4*	*Yes – 93%* No – *7%*
2. Percentage of students who achieve acceptable standard/standard of excellence on diploma exams	Yes- *58* No - *2*	Yes – *97%* No – *3%*
3. Participation rates: percentage of students in grades 3, 6, and 9 who wrote provincial achievement tests and student participation in diploma courses. Achievement Tests Diploma Exams	 Yes – *51* No *9* Yes – *56* No - *4*	 Yes – *85%* No – *15%* Yes – *93%* No – *4%*
4. Percentage of students who receive a high school diploma or certificate, or enter post-secondary studies within six years of entering grade 9.	Yes –*54* No - *6*	Yes – *90%* No – *10%*
5. Percentage of parents satisfied with quality of education	Yes – *58* No - *2*	Yes – *97%* No – *37%*
6. Percentage of students satisfied overall variety and challenge	Yes – *55* No – *5* Yes – *49* No - *11*	Yes – *92%* No – *8%* Yes – *82%* No – *18%*
7. Goal 2 – Local measures	Yes – *57* No - *3*	Yes – *95%* No –*5%*
8. Goal 3 – Local measures	Yes – *54* No - *6*	*Yes – 90%* No – *10%*
9. Goal 4 – Local measures	Yes – *56* No - *4*	Yes – *93%* No – *7%*
10. Goal 5 – Percentage satisfied with opportunities to learn technology spreadsheets word processing network communications Ratio of student to computer upgrading	 Yes – *36* No– *24* Yes – *39* No – *21* Yes – *38* No – *22* Yes – *54* No - *6*	 Yes – *60%* *No – 40%* Yes – *65%* No – *35%* Yes – *63%* No – *27%* Yes – *90%* No – *10%*
11. Goal 7 – Percentage parents satisfied with information on progress and achievement jurisdiction spending on instruction and administration spending per student per year	 Yes – *57* No – *3* Yes –*56* No – *4* Yes – *52* No - *8*	 Yes – *95%* No – *5%* Yes –*93%* No – *7%* Yes – *87%* No – *13%*
12. Local measures for provincial goals identified 1997-98 to 1999-2000 plan? Local measures reported on? Local measures changed or not reported?	Yes –*41* No – *19* All – *18* None – *0* Some – *19* Yes – *22* No - *8*	Yes – *68%* No – *32%* Yes – *73%* No – *27%*
13. Measures for local goals identified 1997-98 to 1999-2000 plan Measures reported on? Any measures changed or not reported on?	Yes – *25* No - *35* All – *14* None – *1* Some – *8* Yes – *12* No - *48*	Yes – *42%* No – *58%* All – *23%* None – *1%* Some – *13%* Yes – *20%* No – *80%*
14. Overall assessment and achievement reported	Yes – *46* No – *3* Partial - *11*	Yes – *77%* No – *5%* Partial – *18%*

Conclusions

The level of compliance of Boards when reporting on required provincial measures range from 60% to 97%. There appears to have been some confusion about the measures related to technology as only 60-65% of the Boards consistently reported on these measures. However, while many of the Boards did not report on the actual performance

measures, these Boards did report on similar measures. For example, students were asked if they were satisfied with "their access to technology" which is a 1998/99 measure for Goal 5. Other Boards asked if students were satisfied with their "opportunity to learn about technology" which does not address the provincial measure directly but is related to the technology outcomes.

With the exception of the measures in Goal 5, the level of compliance ranges between 85-97%. One area that was slightly lower (85%) is related to how boards are reporting participation rates for achievement tests. A few boards reported the actual numbers of students instead of the percentage of students who wrote the tests.

Jurisdiction Strategies for Improvement

School jurisdiction AERRs were analyzed to determine how the AERR might be most effectively linked to planning. Specifically, superintendents were asked to provide input on the following questions: what areas have you identified as needing improvement in the AERR and how are you addressing these areas in your planning process. The responses are detailed in Table 9.

Table 9 - Strategies for Improvement

Area	No. of Responses	Percentages	Ranking
Student achievement	11	23	1
Technology	10	21	2
Satisfaction levels (student, staff, parent)	9	19	3
Using the reporting and planning to improve instruction	8	17	4
Process for improvement of teacher evaluation and growth plans	4	8	5
Parent involvement	3	6	6
Professional development	3	6	6
Total	48	100	

Findings

Forty-eight comments were noted in relation to strategies for improvement in the AERR. The highest category of improvement statements (11) were related to improving student achievement with emphasis on junior and senior high mathematics results. Ten statements were recorded for the second highest category of improving technology within the district. Nine comments related to improvement of the level of satisfaction and eight statements were related to using the AERR results to improve instruction. The remaining items involved a range of concerns from improving teacher evaluation and growth plans (4) to increasing parental involvement (3) and professional development (3).

Conclusion

School districts are focussing their energy on improving student achievement with special emphasis on mathematics and integrating technology into the classroom. School jurisdiction staff are examining ways of improving the satisfaction levels of their students, parents, and staff.

Proposed Changes to AERRs

Superintendents were also asked to identify areas of improvement that Alberta Learning could make to improve the AERR process; these are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10 – Proposed Changes to AERRs

Area	No. of Comments	Percentage	Ranking
AERR Concerns/Modifications • Process too complex • Cost of surveys • Quality data vs. quantity data • Linkage between district and Alberta Learning priorities • Micro-managing • Management Information Reporting Schedules (MIRS) vs AERR • Add a strengths section • Explore where priorities come from	17	64	1
Facilities planning and funding	2	8	2
Timing of planning guide	2	8	2
ECS funding	1	4	3
Curriculum changes	1	4	3
Counseling policy should change	1	4	3
Francophone governance	1	4	3
Basic Ed definition should be more visible	1	4	3
Total Number of Comments	26	100	

Findings

The major concern (17) identified by superintendents was that the AERR process was too complex and costly and that it was difficult to align the jurisdiction's priorities with Alberta Learning. Superintendents also questioned the cost of conducting surveys and

the relationship between the AERR and the Management of Information and Reporting Schedules.

Conclusion

Alberta Learning needs to continue to adjust the AERR process in consultation with the jurisdictions with the view to reducing the complexity of the reporting requirement. Alberta Learning needs to continue to build strong linkages with the jurisdictions in relation to the Government of Alberta's Three-Year Plan for Education. A review of the relationship between the Management Information Reporting Schedules (MIRS) and the AERR requirements should also receive further discussion between Alberta Learning and our partners

Meetings with Superintendent or Designate

To ensure continuity in the review of the school jurisdictions' 1997/98 AERRs, three education managers from the Education Planning and Results Team (EP&RT) of the Regional Office and Native Education (RONE) Branch reviewed the reports. Education managers who liaise with the jurisdiction met with the jurisdiction's superintendent or a designate to share the review and conduct an interview on the areas addressed in this report. Fifty-two out of 60 interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding the product and process of the AERR. The information collected has been very positive.

Findings - Audiences

AERRs are prepared for a number of audiences:

Table 11 – Audiences

Audience	Number Out of 52	Percent
Board/central office staff/school administrators/school staff	43	83
Parents/school councils	42	81
Alberta Learning	38	73
General public	35	67
Parishes	7	13

In a number of jurisdictions, the report is summarized or produced in another form for the general public. Nine superintendents indicated that the full report is available to the public but they have not had any requests for it.

Conclusion

Many superintendents see the AERR as an internal improvement document used to identify areas of strength, growth, and improvement. Various formats of the AERR are used to communicate with targeted publics.

Effective Processes in the Development of the AERR

A number of effective practices in the preparation of the AERRs were identified:

Table 12 – Effective Practices

Effective Practice	Number Out of 52	Percent
Use of feedback from schools	27	52
Use of targets and information for reflection	20	38
Use of data from surveys	17	33
Focus on priorities	6	12
Use in strategic planning	4	8

Approximately one-third of the jurisdictions indicated that the process used in developing the AERR was very important. The process creates ownership in the report and in the next plan.

Conclusion

The process for development of AERRs is an area for improvement for a substantial proportion (1/3) of school jurisdictions. Results reports should be created with input from a number of education stakeholders. Areas for improvement identified in the results reports must be addressed either immediately or in the next education plan.

Areas of Strength

Superintendents stated the AERRs had identified a number of areas of strength:

Table 13 – Areas of Strength

Area of Strength	Number Out of 52	Percent
Student achievement	24	46
Communication and involvement	18	35
Broader focus/student needs	12	23
Technology	10	19
Staff commitment	8	15
Improved instruction	6	12
Financial accountability	6	12
Completion rates	3	6

Superintendents indicated that in most areas student achievement, as measured by achievement tests and diploma exams, was improving or was at an acceptable level. Assessing achievement through the use of a broader range of assessment tools, rather than just achievement tests and diploma exams, was cited as a strength along with meeting the needs of all students.

Areas for Improvement

Superintendents stated the AERRs had identified a number of areas for improvement:

Table 14 – Areas for Improvement

Area for Improvement	Number Out of 52	Percent
Broader focus/student needs	23	44
Student achievement	20	38
Technology as a teaching/learning tool	12	23
Communication	5	10

It should be noted that areas for improvement were also noted as areas of strength. Many superintendents indicated that progress was being made in these areas but there is still work to be done. An example of this would be that jurisdictions were satisfied with the achievement of students in mathematics diploma exams but saw the need for improvement in other areas of mathematics. Superintendents expressed concern with having more students with high needs and the cost of meeting these needs.

Conclusion

Areas of strength and those for improvement are not mutually exclusive. In many cases, progress in reaching goals and targets is being made but there is still work to be done.

Ways to Improve Measures

Superintendents stated the ways that AERRs could be improved:

Table 15 – Ways to Improve Measures

Improvement	Number Out of 52	Percent
Use of qualitative data rather than strictly quantitative	7	13
Ensure data collected is Necessary/meaningful	6	12
Acceptance of parallel data	5	10

Superintendents indicated that Alberta Learning should assess the data being collected for quality and necessity. It was also stated that when the exact data are unavailable, Alberta Learning should accept parallel data of either a quantitative or qualitative nature.

Many superintendents indicated that there is more to schools, teaching, and learning than can be measured. There is a need for qualitative data as well as quantitative. A few superintendents indicated that parents sometimes felt disenfranchised from the planning and reporting process because the areas that are important to them are not always included in the plans and reports.

Conclusion

Data collection for AERRs must be evaluated to ensure that the data being collected is both necessary and meaningful. The use of qualitative data for reporting needs to be explored.

Sharing of Excellence in AERRs

Superintendents indicated the manner in which they prefer to share excellence in AERRs:

Table 16 – Sharing of Excellence in AERRs

Sharing	Number Out of 52	Percent
CASS/DM meeting in August	18	35
Roundtables in major centers	8	15

Superintendents indicated that the use of scheduled meetings to share excellence in the preparation and presentation of AERRs was preferable. Three superintendents stated they had no interest in this type of meeting. Some superintendents indicated that a meeting would be an appropriate place to clarify types of reporting such as AERRs and MIRS.

Conclusion

The use of the CASS/DM meeting in August to focus on excellence in planning and reporting would be the choice of many superintendents.

Refining AERRs

Superintendents indicated that AERRs could be refined:

Table 17 – Refining AERRs

Refinements	Number Out of 52	Percent
Relaxation of rigid format	10	19
Change of timeline	8	15
Preparation of yearly updates to plans	4	8
Continuity in survey questions	3	6

Some superintendents indicated that the timing of the plans and AERRs is confusing to parents and the public. Many superintendents indicated that when the AERR is completed and areas of improvement are identified, an action plan to address the Three-Year Plan is submitted six months later. Many of the areas for improvement have already received extensive attention and work. School jurisdictions also recommended that AERRs could be celebrated and publicized by MLAs and the government as a whole.

Conclusion

Some of the concerns around the rigid format and yearly preparation have been addressed in the *Guide for School Board Planning and Reporting, April 1999*. The reduction in the number of required measures may also address some of the survey concerns.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Actions

This report makes a number of recommendations based on key themes and issues evident in the school boards' documents. These recommendations are related to actions taken or under consideration by Alberta Learning.

Recommendations	Actions Taken or Under Consideration
1 The analysis of school board's AERRs indicates that 55% of jurisdictions are reporting fiscal pressures across a range of budget areas, including: 1) special needs students 2) technology implementation 3) operating small schools affected by sparcity and distance factors and 4) increasing staff costs. This information should be given careful consideration within the context of the ongoing funding framework review.	➢ The funding cap on students with severe disabilities was removed. ➢ Funding caps on ESL students was removed. ➢ 151 million dollars has been allocated to eliminate school board deficits. ➢ Sparcity and distance monies were allocated to six high needs school boards. ➢ Innovation fund dollars were awarded to eight school boards for development of wide area networks. ➢ Monthly payments to school boards, from both the General Revenue Fund and the Alberta School Foundation Fund are saving school boards' interest costs. ➢ An MLA lead committee has been formed to make recommendations to the Minister of Learning on funding changes that address differential costs resulting from growth and density factors that are outside the control of school jurisdictions.
2 A number of jurisdictions have been identified as engaging in exemplary practices in relationship to the creation of their AERR. Alberta Learning, working in cooperation with CASS, should identify opportunities to profile these exemplary practices.	➢ Alberta Learning staff are discussing with the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) executive committee opportunities to profile school jurisdictions that are exhibiting best practices in implementing accountability processes.

3	Analysis of AERRs and superintendent interviews demonstrates that some jurisdictions are struggling with accountability requirements often associated with required goals, strategies, results or measures defined in *The Government of Alberta's Three-Year Plan for Education*. Alberta Learning should make available support initiatives to assist any jurisdiction wanting assistance with the implementation of the Alberta accountability requirements.	➢ The Regional Office and Native Education Branch managers will be meeting with superintendents in September –October 1999 to review the school jurisdiction 1999-2002 three-year education plans. At these meetings discussion will focus on the relationship between school board planning and reporting and on optimal relationships between provincial education plans and school board plans. Superintendents will be asked to identify ways to improve these relationships.
4	School jurisdictions have identified a range of concerns regarding socio-economic variables negatively affecting the achievement of students. Goal 3, involving the coordination of services to children, has received considerable inter-departmental attention in *The Government of Alberta's 1999-2002 Three-Year Plan for Education*. While recognizing the intensive inter-departmental efforts underway, it is important to underscore the need to continue high prioritization of this goal area.	➢ Alberta learning will share the AERR roll-up Final Report with people-related government departments to underscore the importance of coordinated delivery of services to children. Significant efforts are underway across government to achieve this goal. ➢ Insights from the AERR roll-up Final Report have been incorporated in discussions with the federal government regarding urban aboriginal issues. ➢ The Student Health Initiative will provide $25.6 million annually to help address a range of student health needs so they are better able to learn at school.
5	This summary of school jurisdiction AERRs indicates that there are a number of success stories related to improving student achievement. For example, school boards report that 1) integrating technology into the classroom, 2) Career and Technology Studies and 3) Outreach Programs are effective strategies. These success stories should be shared in appropriate ways with government members, education stakeholders and the public.	➢ Alberta Learning has distributed the AERR roll-up Final Report to superintendents, school board chairpersons, and principals, and stakeholder organizations. ➢ Alberta Learning will continue to pursue opportunities to promote these success stories. ➢ Good news highlights will be published in the fall edition of *Infocus*, distributed widely throughout the province.

6 Given finite resources, there is a need for greater commonality between provincial and board priorities to achieve implementation efficiency. Alberta Learning should take the lead in providing opportunities for greater consensus among school board and provincial priorities in the 2000-2003 and subsequent Three-Year Plans for Education.	➢ Alberta Learning is looking at how to implement a more collaborative approach in the development of province-wide priorities. ➢ Consultation with stakeholders will provide important input to the goals and strategies to be incorporated in Alberta Learning's 2000-2003 and subsequent three-year education plans.
7 School jurisdiction AERRs point to a variety of issues that are limiting student achievement in mathematics. It is recommended that Alberta Learning give consideration to a broad range of math inputs (program, staff, pre-service and in-service training, etc.) to effect a concentrated effort in this curriculum area.	➢ Alberta Learning will explore with stakeholders additional ways for improving student achievement in secondary mathematics. ➢ Alberta Learning is funding secondary Mathematics inservice opportunities in 1999-2000 through the regional professional development consortia.
8. Alberta Learning should encourage the design and delivery of in-service sessions on planning, measurement and evaluation design. The goal would be to build upon field-based expertise for the planning and reporting requirements of the *Government Accountability Act.*	➢ Alberta Learning will review its support of the Regional Professional Development Consortia in terms of province-wide learning priorities and funding strategies.